

An Evangelical View of Revelation

Fundamental Parameters

ABSTRACT SUMMARY

Nathaniel Parker

Dr. Jeffery Bingham SYSTH 7214

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Introduction

The doctrine of revelation is one of the most foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, as it answers the question as to how God has made Himself known to humanity.¹ Scholars throughout the centuries have attempted to answer this question with varying degrees of success. Evangelicals must also answer this question by examining the fundamental parameters concerning the doctrine of revelation. This essay will take a closer look at such parameters through a definition of the doctrine, the major categories and avenues of revelation, examine how major models of revelation fit within an evangelical doctrine of revelation, and determine if revelation is possible within other world religions.

Definition of Doctrine

The doctrine of revelation is defined as God unveiling Himself to humanity.² The opening passages of Scripture in Genesis 1 reveal the fact that not only has God created the heavens and the earth, but that, contra Deism, God speaks to and works in His creation, while contra Pantheism, He retains the distinction between Creator and creation.³ God is not only the Genesis

¹. The term “revelation” in this essay refers to the concept of divine revelation.

². James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2nd ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2000–2001), 49. The term “revelation” derives from the Greek term *apokalypsis*.

³. IVP Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms defines Deism as “The belief that understands God as distant, in that God created the universe but then left it to run its course on its own, following certain ‘laws of nature’ that God had built into the universe,” and Pantheism as “the designation for the understanding of the close connection between the world and the divine reality found in certain religions.” Pantheism is contrasted with Panentheism which is defined as “belief that God’s being includes and permeates the entire universe so that everything exists in God. In contrast to pantheism, panentheists declare that God’s being is greater than and not exhausted by the universe.”

1 *Creator*, He is also the Genesis 1 *Revealer* and the *Revealed*. In Genesis 1:3, God speaks the creation of light into existence, breaking the darkness and the silence of Genesis 1:2. An evangelical doctrine of revelation must recognize the need for continual divine speech to break the silence. As clearly seen in Elie Weisel's *Night*, the darkness has not been dispelled and will not entirely be dispelled until the return of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals must not fall into a false optimistic delusion that the Christian life rescues humanity from the pain of darkness this side of the return of Christ. The world continues to remain in a sin-cursed darkness, and it is through the grace and mercy of God to speak and not leave His creation in silence.

John 1 parallels Genesis 1 by extending God's creative act beyond the act of divine speech to equating Himself as the Word in God the Son, Jesus Christ, the living Word of God (John 1:3; more under special revelation). As in Genesis 1, the living Word of God breaks through and overcomes the darkness and the silence (John 1:5).

Conclusion

God has made Himself known to humanity through general revelation (creation) and specifically through Scripture (the written Word of God) and Jesus Christ (the living Word of God). Both general and special revelation are valid in an evangelical doctrine of revelation, with special revelation building upon general revelation and providing specific knowledge of God and the knowledge of salvation to humanity. In addition to the revelation of God through specific propositions in Scripture, all of Scripture and its variety of genres are included in God's special revelation. While the teaching of the church and church tradition is not equal to God's special revelation in Scripture, there is still a place for the teaching of the church and church tradition to clarify God's special revelation in Scripture and to teach each generation that what the church has believed about God as revealed in Scripture.

God has also revealed Himself through history (as attested to in Scripture), although evangelicals must clarify the distinction between the acts of God within general history with God's unfolding of salvation history, as well as distinguish between God's indirect revelation through history with the direct and special revelation found in Scripture and in Jesus Christ. Revelation is not an internal subjective feeling or "new awareness", nor is revelation open-ended and never ended but fixed, although the Holy Spirit does illumine existing revelation in Scripture to the believer, and God answers prayers in accordance with His will, aligned with His existing revelation in Scripture and in Jesus Christ (without providing new revelation). God can and does speak in symbolic language both in Scripture and in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, the necessity of special revelation emphasizes the necessity of global evangelism and missions in order for the evangelical community to proclaim God's special revelation around the world in fulfilling the Great Commission commanded by Jesus Christ. Not only has God

revealed Himself to humanity in special revelation, but God has tasked humanity with the mission of bringing others around the world to God's special revelation through the work of evangelism and missions.

Evangelicals can rejoice that God has made Himself known to humanity, and that salvation has been made possible through Jesus Christ as revealed to humanity through Scripture. Evangelicals can also rest in the assurance that God's revelation, the Word of God, will continue go forth (Isaiah 55:11) and shall endure forever (Isaiah 40:8).